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REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR, THE UNFPA COUNTRY PROGRAMME FOR THE CONGO

Report of the Executive Director

I. BACKGROUND

1. UNFPA recommends and requests that funding approval authority for the comprehensive population programme for the Congo be increased by $1.8 million in order to extend the current programme for a bridging period of two years (1997-1998) so that the programming cycle can be harmonized with those of other United Nations agencies, including UNDP, UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), from 1999 onwards.

2. In June 1991, the Governing Council approved the second country programme for the Congo in the amount of $4 million for the period 1991-1994, $2.7 million of which would come from UNFPA's regular resources and $1.3 million would be sought from multi-bilateral sources. By early 1994, only 34 per cent of regular funds had been absorbed, the result of socio-political changes and disturbances in the country dating back to 1991. In view of these problems, it was not possible to mobilize multi-bilateral funds, and UNFPA authorized funding the total amount from its regular resources. The country programme was also extended until December 1996 without any additional funding. By end 1995, available funds were estimated at $2 million, 49 per cent of the initially approved programme. Better implementation rates are expected for the remainder of the extended programme in view of increased political stability and programme management capacity.

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3. The unexpected devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 marked the culmination of four years of socio-political upheaval and changes stemming from an acute underlying financial crisis in the country. The ensuing adoption of a three-year (1995-1998) structural adjustment plan in early 1995, plus presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 1997, led to a decision by all United Nations agencies to set up bridging programmes for the 1997-1998 period.

4. A November 1995 mid-term review of the UNFPA programme found that, despite this state of flux, the country programme was well designed and its objectives and strategies still relevant to the national context and the objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The review did point out that, other than new activities initiated in 1995, the second country programme had not yet really been implemented. Projects under execution since 1991 had been carried over from the first country programme, which had been conceived in a different socio-economic environment. The review recommended concentrating energies on reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health (hereafter referred to as reproductive health), and information, education and communication (IEC) and advocacy activities.

5. Increase in funding authority is essential so that: (a) programme implementation can be reinvigorated after the past years of instability; (b) the scope and dimension of reproductive health, and population IEC activities can be widened and intensified to strengthen both information and service outreach and to help develop a management information system (MIS); (c) the programme's outreach can be broadened to target new groups such as the rural population and youth, while strengthening gender activities; (d) coordination can be reinforced, a population policy adopted and implemented and sectoral strategies elaborated; and (e) UNFPA's programme cycle can be harmonized with those of other United Nations agencies.

II. STATUS OF PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

6. The overall strategy for programme implementation was based on the Government's population strategies as elaborated in the 1990-1994 Social and Economic Development Plan and on the findings and recommendations of the 1990 programme review and strategy development (PRSD) mission. The main focus was on strengthening national capacity, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to better plan, coordinate, manage and implement population programmes, while also consolidating reproductive health services through development of an IEC strategy for such priority target groups as women and adolescents.

Reproductive health

7. UNFPA support for maternal and child health and family planning (MCH/FP) activities has helped to make family planning units operational in 20 out of the 60 public clinics in the country. Medical and paramedical staff have been trained in family planning techniques and procedures, while

research on sterility and on the clinical use of partographs has been conducted, in addition to a small knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) study. To date, achievements have been limited since it has not been possible to expand beyond the level of pilot activities. Activities scheduled to start in 1996 are designed to broaden the outreach and scope of reproductive health IEC carried out by NGOs and religious associations working with rural and urban youth and women.

8. The population education programme is now fully integrated into the general basic school curriculum and is taught in all 246 junior high schools as well as the country's senior high schools. Beginning in 1995, population education has been introduced progressively into primary schools and university-based teacher training programmes. In addition, the programme has been broadened to reach out beyond the school context into the informal sector and address the urgent demands of such problems as HIV/AIDS, drug and sexual abuse, environmental damage and unwanted teenage pregnancies.

9. The recent adoption of the National Health Development Plan promises a new era of integrated and coordinated health sector activities. The high rate of urbanization and literacy among the Congolese makes the population relatively receptive to IEC campaigns and to family planning services. The increase in the numbers of NGOs and the emergence of private sector initiatives also offer new possibilities to widen the scope of programme implementation and the provision of services. The emergence of a pluralistic society following the reintroduction of a democratic political system augurs well for the future participation of women and youth in the formulation of development policies.

10. Increased funding of $1.6 million is needed for the reproductive health sector ($1.1 million in new resources plus $500,000 that would be redistributed from the area of population and development strategies). This will allow the programme to improve the range of reproductive health activities in the public sector by doubling the number of centres providing services and counselling, by stepping up training, by helping initiate a management information system, by decentralizing management, and by providing support to the National Health Development Plan for the procurement and supply of essential drugs, including contraceptives. Over the next three years, UNFPA will help to strengthen recently introduced reproductive health services and IEC activities, including the establishment of counselling centres for adolescents and youth, while encouraging greater emphasis on gender-sensitive reproductive health activities. The additional funds will also help to improve population education by better coordination of IEC activities and by promoting reproductive health concepts through adult literacy programmes and other extra-curricular activities.

Population and development strategies

11. Work has started on the third population census in preparation for the enumeration in mid-1996. A study of the 1984 census results has been limited to national statistics so far, with planned

regional analysis and other studies on migration and fertility not yet concluded. Consolidation of the civil registration system was effective -- all planned 642 centres are in existence even though the supply of registers to these centres needs to be improved. Updating of demographic movements since the 1984 census has been possible because of the registration of births and deaths.

12. No additional resources are required for this area although new activities are to be developed relating to the analysis of census and civil registration data. Activities will be undertaken in 1996 to ensure finalization and adoption of the National Population Policy and to strengthen population coordinating mechanisms. Of the $1.9 million approved for action in this area, only $1.4 million will be required because of the low implementation rate of data collection and policy activities. This leaves $500,000 available for redistribution to the area of reproductive health.

Advocacy

13. Since advocacy activities will be new to the Congo programme, $400,000 is required to initiate advocacy activities through an NGO consortium project. One group of NGOs will help advocate reproductive health measures, especially with regard to family planning and HIV/AIDS awareness, among displaced persons, while promoting better understanding of the respective social roles of men and women. A second group of NGOs will be charged with disseminating the ICPD Programme of Action and that of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Programme reserve

14. An increase of $300,000 would be required as a reserve to cover any unforeseen activities that may be approved within the framework of this programme as well as an umbrella project, which will include programming activities for the next comprehensive population programme.

Financial summary

15. As indicated in paragraph 1, UNFPA proposes to extend the comprehensive population programme for the Congo for a bridging period of two years (1997-1998) and to increase the funding approval authority by $1.8 million from UNFPA's regular resources. The programme would thus total $5.8 million for 1991-1998. The following table shows how that amount would be accommodated by programme area.

Sector as approved by Governing Council	Resource distribution as approved by the Governing Council 1991 ($)	New sectors	Resource distribution in new sectors ($)	Proposed increased funding approval authority for 1996 ($)	Total ($)
MCH/FP	1,000,000	Reproductive health	2,000,000	1,600,000	3,600,000
IEC	600,000				
Women, population & development	400,000				
Population policy formulation	700,000	Population & development strategies	1,900,000	(500,000)	1,400,000
Data collection and analysis	1,200,000				
		Advocacy	-	400,000	400,000
Programme reserve	100,000		100,000	300,000	400,000
Total	4,000,000		4,000,000	1,800,000	5,800,000

III. RECOMMENDATION

16. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve the extension of the Congo country programme through 1998 and that it approve the increased funding authority for the Republic of the Congo country programme by $1.8 million as detailed in the preceding table, subject to the availability of resources, and authorize the Executive Director to make the necessary arrangements for its management, funding and execution.